

## THE MASTER KEY

## CHAPTER XV.

The New Plan.

THE morning brought John Dorr, Everett and Tom Kane together to discuss the problem before them. The papers so necessary for the continuation of the deal that Everett had proposed were dead lost. Where they were gone, whether they had indeed been taken, that more immediate thing could tell. But more immediate yet was the need of extricating John. Two plain clothes men already sat near by, ready to take him to prison on a charge of killing Henry Pell.

"It's really only a formality," said the manager of the hotel. "The man was a robber and Mr. Dorr tried to capture him as he had every right to do, and the man was killed."

This failed to comfort Ruth. To her mind the presence of the police officers, the fact that John Dorr was under arrest in a strange city, made her feel that her husband was in great trouble.

She sat holding the old coat's hand, Mr. Everett should come. He had already telephoned, and she tried to be brave till he should come. Everett arrived, and the moment she saw him she heaved a sigh of relief. He was so capable looking, so cool, so gentlemanly, even to John that even Tom Kane softened his grim visage a little.

"I'm under arrest," John told him. "The officers were good enough to let me stay here till you came. Now I must be off. Let me introduce you all around."

This done, John Dorr went on. "They can let you all about things, and when you've learned the worst come down and get me out, if you can."

Everett agreed, and Dorr rose, and with a smile said good-bye to his companions. As he left the hotel with an officer on either side of him, Ruth broke down and cried. Tom Kane comforted her as best he could till Everett suggested that they had best go to some more private place and discuss matters.

In Ruth's room she and the cook explained affairs briefly, Everett following their narrative carefully up to the incidents of the night before. When Ruth had finished and the cook was silent, Everett thought a moment, then he laughed.

"I don't mean to make fun of an old man," he apologized, "but I've known John Dorr for years and this is precisely the kind of trouble he creates in."

"But he's in jail!" Ruth protested heartily.

"True enough," was the reply. "That is the first thing I must do, get him out. I'll be off now and see the district attorney and talk him out."

"Please hurry!" Ruth pleaded.

"Don't worry," was the cheerful response. A moment later he was gone, promising to bring John back with him.

"What do you think of Mr. Everett?" Ruth demanded of Tom Kane.

The old man at his pipe and scrutinized the ceiling. "Well," he said judicially, "considering the looks of one on Wilkerson's side and then on John's side, I should think that this Everett was on the right side."

With this judgment she had to be content. But she insisted that he tell her all about the conditions at the "Master Key" mine. "I know you never told me all the truth," she said.

"Well," he answered her, "there's not much to tell one way and a heap in another. The mine's practically shut down. You know that you went away, then John and then Wilkerson. Pretty much all was left was me and Tom Kane. But, no kind of representative Wilkerson, and I stuck up for John."

"Please hurry!" Ruth pleaded.

The result was that things went to the bad and the boys they come to me and want to know how long they've got to stay off."

"I suppose you mean how long before a pay day, I say to you. So far as I know nobody has paid you off."

"They agreed with me, but said they couldn't feed their folks without money, and if they got no money for it why work?"

"They haven't been paid, then?"

"No. And Wilkerson cut off all credit at the store. I guess I got in bad with Tom Kane when I divided up a lot of Dorr and Everett that was in the cook's kitchen among the worst of ones. There was some ugly talk, and before I could find out the boys' minds they treated me pretty roughly. So I got rid myself that I would come to San Francisco and explain things—how Wilkerson deserted the camp and the mine was closed down and your people were starving."

"Oh!" murmured Ruth, agitated at the first story. "And I seem to have been

unfortunate all around, but I know that John was in the wrong."

Tom Kane fixed his honest old eyes on the old man and shook his head. "I don't want to discourage you, Ruthie," he said quietly, "but until that man Wilkerson is out of the mine for good you can't do more than patch matters up temporarily."

Meanwhile Wilkerson and Jean Darnell were anxiously awaiting news from Henry Pell. It was getting along in the forenoon and the woman insisted that if he had succeeded in getting the papers he should have been on the ground long before the company

be right down.

When the boy had gone she called Tom Kane on the telephone and told him that she was going. "John sent a car for me," she added.

"All right," came back the answer. "I'll just travel along. Maybe I might help John myself."

So it was agreed, and they went to the lobby, where Ruth showed the note to the clerk in her impulsive way. Something in that official's expression made the old cook unobtrusively take out his revolver and see that it was in good condition. He followed Ruth to the street and into the waiting machine.

This move disconcerted Drake. He did not intend to have two passengers, but he saw no help for it and merely nodded when Ruth ordered him to take her to the city prison. He started his engine and they sped off up the hill.

They rode for some time and as neither of them was acquainted with the city it did not occur to them that they were being rapidly conveyed into a part of town only partly built up and now veiled in dense clouds of swirling fog.

"It's a long way," Ruth remarked several times, but Kane merely craned his eyes busily pondering over some method of extricating John Dorr.

Suddenly the car swerved around a corner, dived down a steep hill and came to a stop before a big gray building—the boarded up residence of an absentee. Reaching back, Drake opened the door, and Ruth sprang out. A figure darted across the sidewalk, and she felt herself clutched by the arm.

She looked into the gleaming, cruel eyes of Wilkerson.

"I've got you now!" he said triumphantly.

"Oh!" moaned Ruth, shrinking back in terror.

"Yes, indeed," Wilkerson taunted her.

But at that moment he heard another voice, stern, commanding and familiar. He looked around into the muzzle of Tom Kane's revolver.

For the moment they faced each other, while Ruth shrieked back still farther. The old man's eyes gleamed, and his trigger finger seemed to rest on the trigger with a precise and delicate touch.

"You here?" said Wilkerson with an oath.

Suddenly the old man's temper flared up. The other saw death in his eyes, turned on his heel and ran as fast as he could up the street.

Without a second's hesitation Kane swung his weapon round till it covered Drake, cowering at his wheel.

"Now you drive us back to the hotel," he thundered. "And if you make a false move I'll drill you as sure as God gave me good shooting eyes."

Drake saw that he was helpless and suitably waited till they were in and then turned his car back toward the center of the city. Tom Kane sat grimly just behind him, with his gun ready. And his mind was piecing things together. Suddenly he saw a policeman on his beat and realized that he was playing his cards for him. He ordered Drake to halt and bailed the officer. To that somewhat astonished individual the cook explained briefly that he had just foiled an abduction plot and that the chauffeur was in it. Though Drake strenuously denied the charge the policeman decided that it was a case for the captain.

"I'll just ride in front here, and we'll go to headquarters," he remarked. "You can put up that gun, old fellow, for I'll see that young fellow doesn't cut up any monkey business."

In the meantime Everett had been carefully managing Dorr's business, and he had been released on nominal bail for a hearing. "And I guess you won't find us very anxious to make it hard for you," said the prosecuting attorney.

Free again, John hastened on taking the quickest route back to the hotel. Everett, sympathetic in this, agreed, and in a few minutes they were at the hotel inquiring for Ruth.

"Why, she left only a little while ago to see you in the prison," said the clerk. "She had a note from you."

"I wrote no note," said John. "Here it is," was the response. "She left it on the desk in her hurry."

Emerging John snatched the sheet of paper, but the instant his eyes lit on it he turned a furious face to Everett.

"It's a forgery, a trick," he said. "I never wrote it."

CHAPTER XVI.  
Too Late!

TOGETHER John and Everett went outside, and from the starter they learned that a car had driven up, that the chauffeur had delivered a note and that later Ruth Gallon had come down and been driven off. "There was an old gentleman with her, Mr. Kane, I believe," the starter added.

John heaved a sigh of relief. "At any rate, Tom will see that she doesn't come to harm," he said.

After a few more questions, which showed them the futility of trying to find Ruth, they re-entered the hotel and settled down to a discussion of business. They were interrupted by

"Humph!" said Kane. "That sounds funny to me."

Ruthie nodded, looking at the note. Then she said, more cheerfully: "I'll dress away. Maybe he needs the Now, you old dear, leave me awhile."

Kane departed, and Ruth quickly changed into street dress. While she was doing this the bellboy returned to say that a machine was waiting for her.

"The one that brought the note," he said. "He says he was told to wait."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Tell him I'm right down."

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## 3

Extraordinary  
FEATURES

THIS WEEK

AT THE

Lowell  
TheatreMonday & Tuesday  
May 3d and 4thEveryday Life  
In LowellOn the Streets and at  
Home, and a  
Grand Baby Show  
with a Regular Picture  
ProgramWednesday & Thursday  
May 5th and 6th"THE  
MASTER  
KEY"

Special

MASTER KEY MATINEE

Thursday 1:30 p. m.

Saturday &amp; Sunday

May 8th and 9th

THE  
SPOILERS

Matinees 2:00 p. m.

Night Shows 8:00 p. m.

ALL SEATS RESERVED

Main Floor - 35c

Loge Seats - 50c

Seat Sale Opens  
Monday 10:00 a. m.At Lowell Theatre  
Box Office

Phone 142

the return of Ruth and the cook, who

recounted the adventures.

"I'll get Wilkerson," John Dorr said quietly when they had finished. Meanwhile we must get ahead with our fixing up of the affairs of the 'Master Key' mine."

Wilkerson's last failure had driven him furious. He did not know what to do and he especially dreaded returning to John Dorr with the news. He walked the streets for a long time, lunched in a cheap house and then doggedly sat down to work. On the way he bought an evening paper and read of Drake's arrest. With aching brows he peered this minutely until he was sure that his tool had not betrayed him so far. But he knew that minutes were precious. He must get into communication with the young man and assure his silence. He could not do this without Mrs. Darnell's help.

As he expected, she flew into a towering rage, but her keen mind saw that Drake must be pacified, and she managed to control herself at last. She read the account carefully and then looked through the rest of the paper for some item about John Dorr. Her eye lit upon an advertisement, which she read twice before speaking; then she pointed it out to Wilkerson. He, too, read it.

FOUND—Deeds to certain mining property. On proof of ownership same will be returned. Reward expected. S. J. C. 34 Hill street.

"They must be the papers," he acknowledged. "Pell probably threw them away for fear of their being used as evidence against him, and some one picked them up."

"This time I shall see to the matter," Jean said sharply. "Whether they are the papers or not, we must be sure."

"Other people will see that ad," he suggested.

"All the more reason for hurry," she snapped. Then she called her maid.

"Estelle," she said, "I want you to dress for the street and go on an errand for me. It is very important, and you must hurry."

"Yes, madame."

"And if you show good judgment you shouldn't be sorry. You know how

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At the word reward there was a

change, and the woman demanded to know how much it would be.

Estelle thought rapidly. It had been impressed on her that haste was necessary. She decided on offering a goodly sum, yet not enough to make the ash man and his wife think they were in possession of papers of extraordinary value. She pulled out her purse and held out \$5. The man was taking it. His wife intervened.

"Twenty dollars," she said cunningly. Estelle bargained for some moments and then said in a tone that was decisive, "If you show me the papers and they are the ones I want I'll give you \$10 and no more."

The deeds were produced, and a glance told her that they belonged to Ruth. She paid the money and hurried away.

Everett and Dorr had gone over the situation thoroughly together, and the broker agreed that he would help out in putting the "Master Key" mine on its feet again.

"I think I can do it tomorrow," he said. "Just let me have all the papers, and I'll go over them tonight."

"Ruth has them," John replied. "We'd best go up and get them now."

Ruth received them cheerfully and promptly went to her trunk for the deeds. Her first search was not rewarded, and she lifted a pained face to John. Then she once more went through all her belongings. It was fruitless. She then remembered the desk and searched it with the same result.

"They're gone!" she stammered.

"Impossible!" said Dorr. "They must be somewhere here."

"No," she mourned. "I've looked everywhere."

Everett was the first to suggest that no time should be lost in locating the missing property. He sent for the evening papers and delved into the "Lost and Found" columns, with the result that he very soon handed a paper to Dorr and pointed out the advertisement which had attracted Wilkerson's attention.

Half an hour later John Dorr turned away from the ash man's door and said to Everett: "I'll bet that was one of Wilkerson's crowd. We must notify the police before he can get away."

They had soon told their difficulties to the sympathetic ear at headquarters and started back for the hotel. John was in the dumps.

"It seems as if everything goes wrong when I try to do something for that little woman," he growled.

"I begin to think myself that you are playing in hard luck," was the reply. "But I always did like a good fight, and this promises to be one. I'll stick, John."

They shook hands.

They found Ruth and Tom Kane anxiously awaiting them. John simply stated the case and then turned to comfort Ruth. He was startled to see how white she was.

"Ruth, Ruth," he cried in alarm. "What is the matter?"

There was no answer. She had fainted away.

All else was forgotten for the time being. A maid and a doctor were quickly summoned, and presently Ruth revived. Old Tom Kane was seated beside her patting her hand.

"The papers!" she moaned.

"Don't you worry about the papers," he said promptly. "We'll look after them."

"But the folks at the mine—who will look after them?" she pleaded.

The old cook swore that he would do so himself with John's help. At this point the doctor interfered with orders that she was to be perfectly quiet.

In the other room they held a consultation. The physician listened to their explanation of what the girl had been through and then said gravely: "She must have an absolute change of scene for a time. Get her away from here instantly."

"But where?" Dorr demanded.

"Why not take her to the southern part of the state for a little while?" he suggested. "But whatever you do, do it quickly. Her nerves won't stand such more."

"I know just the place," Kane said. "Take her to Los Angeles and then out

to the hills to some quiet hotel. You can catch the night train."

"Nonsense!" Everett said quickly. "All of you go with her. I'll look after matters here for a week. It need be I'll go down to the mine myself."

With the papers safely in her possession at last Jean Darnell became once more the guiding spirit and told Wilkerson that there was only one thing for them to do—get out of town immediately.